

Watershed Protection Department Flood Safety Communication Plan 2015

Overview

Austin has a long history of flooding and will continue to flood because of our topography, weather patterns from Gulf of Mexico and across Mexico from the Pacific Ocean, cold fronts from the north and hurricanes from the east and south. The combination of rocky soils, steep terrain and very intense rainfall make Central Texas uniquely vulnerable to major flooding, which is why the National Weather Service calls Central Texas "Flash Flood Alley."

In fact, flash flooding is Austin's most common weather emergency. Floods can range in magnitude from ones where a handful of roads may need to be closed to ones endangering thousands of lives and properties. All floods can be deadly, so it is critical that current residents, the 100 people on average who move here every day and the 21 million visitors to Austin each year are aware of the dangers that flash floods pose, especially along roads and trails.

Since 75 percent of flood-related deaths in Texas occur in vehicles, it is imperative that we continue to promote the message of "Save Yourself! Turn Around – Don't Drown." A recent survey by Watershed Engineering showed that 93% of respondents have heard that phrase. However, it is easy for people to become complacent and forget that floods can happen during major droughts. In fact, a report by the U.S. Geological Survey states:

"It is apparent that a community can deal effectively with the threat of flooding only to the extent that its citizens have a clear understanding and retain an awareness of flood hazards...The public's memory of flood events is short. Thus, a continuing education program related to flood hazards and how to cope with flooding should be implemented."

In addition, those living in floodplains are subject to localized flooding should also be aware of the risks of their location and measures they can take to protect their families and properties. Parents should also teach their children not to play in drainage infrastructure or near flooded creeks.

According to a recent survey, about 70 percent of Austin residents prefer to receive flood warnings on the television. Because of this, we are broadening our campaign to include television as well as print, radio, social media, etc.

Goal

To provide clear, accurate information about the dangers of flooding and steps that can be taken to protect lives and property.

Message

"Save Yourself! Turn Around – Don't Drown." The campaigns will emphasize that devastating floods can occur even during periods of drought, encourage personal responsibility for one's own safety and emphasize that living in a floodplain can be a significant risk.

We also have three relatively new tools to promote:

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1. ATXfloods.com, which shows road closures due to flooding. We are encouraging people to check this web site *before* they get on the road. Information about this tool will be included in emergency advertising and in the advertising campaigns for Flood Safety.
2. ATXfloods Alerts! This allows people to sign up for alerts via text, email or phone about flooding in creeks near their location or all creeks in Austin. This tool will be promoted to a wide audience, so people can receive alerts about road closures as well as more specific creek flooding, i.e., everyone from current residents to visitors to those living in a floodplain.
3. FloodPro, which allows people to check to see if they live, are buying a house, etc., in or near a floodplain. The initial audience is real estate agents, developers, homebuyers, etc. However, this tool will be promoted to a wide audience as we enhance FloodPro to more clearly indicate flood risk, such as depth, as it will allow people to find a safer route in advance of storms.

The results of the recent survey show that all three of these new tools should be more heavily promoted. For example, 80 percent of respondents said they preferred to view floodplain maps online, but only 30 percent were aware that this was possible.

Audience/Stakeholders

External

- Drivers
- Homeowners and renters in floodplains
- Homeowners and renters in flood-prone areas outside of the floodplain
- Visitors to Austin
- Users of the trail system
- Parents
- Youth
- Neighborhood leaders/associations, civic groups, other community organizations
- Visitors
- Insurance agents
- Investors/landlords
- Real estate agents
- Spanish and English speakers – Other languages – APD or other
- Em Translator
- Homeless

Internal

- WPD Staff
- Management Staff
- Director and Assistant Directors
- Assistant City Manager and City Manager
- Other City Departments
- 3-1-1 Call Center
- First Responders
- Boards and Commissions
- Mayor and Council

Overview of Campaigns

October 2014 – September 2015

- Neighborhood / public meetings on flood safety and related topics as

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- Neighborhood/public meetings on flood safety and related topics as appropriate.
- Emergency Advertising and social media when flooding imminent –

Budget \$24,000

When storms are imminent, WPD runs radio and digital ads and increases its presence on social media with flood safety emergency messages. The emergency messages promote the web site, ATXfloods.com, with real-time information about flooded roads and closures.

Winter/Spring Campaign – Budget - \$85,500

Kicking off in February at WeatherFest, the Spring Flood Safety campaign runs through May and includes a poster contest, swift water rescue demonstration, the 100th anniversary of the April 1915 flood, Austin's Flood Safety Awareness Week April 19-25, and a mix of television, radio, print, online, social media, taxi cab and Cap Metro bus ads.

Austin's Flood Safety Awareness spring campaign educates Austin drivers about the dangers of driving across flooded low water crossings through print, radio and online advertising as well as through social media and traditional media from February through May. In the past, the campaign has a reach of about 1.3 million people with an estimated 5.7 million gross impressions.

As part of this campaign, Austin holds a "Save Yourself! Turn Around – Don't Drown" poster contest, so children learn about this important message and influence their parents about flood safety. Area meteorologists are invited to judge the finalists among the poster contest entries. The emphasis is for all drivers to understand that when they choose to drive across a flooded roadway, they are endangering themselves, their passengers and emergency workers who attempt to rescue them.

In addition, April 22, 2015, marks the 100th anniversary of the 1915 flood when Shoal and Waller Creeks flooded and met in downtown. (Note: we're researching details of this particular flood to ensure we are historically accurate.) We're planning a news conference/event that will emphasize Austin's long history of flooding.

The swift water demonstration with the AFD and EMS is planned for Saturday, April 25.

Summer/Fall Advertising Campaign – Budget - \$84,300

WPD will run radio and online ads in the fall about the dangers of driving across flooded roads. The campaign is timed to coincide with the most active period of hurricane activity and the beginning of classes at universities with the corresponding influx of new people to the community. It will include a mix of television, radio, print, online, social media, taxi cab, and Cap Metro ads.

Outreach for Properties in Floodplains – Budget - \$24,000 (advertising), \$36,000 (printing)

Floodplain Changes

Post cards and advertisements to inform residents of changes to the floodplain.

ATXfloods Alerts Postcard

This postcard would announce the new tool that alerts subscribers to flooding. Post card will be mailed to everyone in the floodplain. We should consider whether we want a separate post card for each watershed, so we can identify which creek individuals live near. This could be important for signing up for Alerts.

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Floodplain Notification Postcard

A recent survey revealed that over 40 percent of people living in a floodplain are not aware of it. This postcard would serve to notify people that they are in a floodplain and to expect a flyer with safety information. It would also provide a link to the web site. Alternatively, the post card could be converted to a letter to accompany a fact sheet. A letter would allow us to briefly discuss other issues associated with living in or near a floodplain such as the recommendation for insurance and permitting requirements. We should consider whether we want a separate letter/post card for each watershed, so we can identify which creek individuals live near. This will increase the cost.

Flyer on Flood Safety and Preparation

A fact sheet will be distributed to all individuals in the floodplain about preparing for a flood. The fact sheet will include information on ATXfloods Alerts, sheltering in place, disaster kits, flood insurance and other ways to protect properties. The flyer will be in English and Spanish.

Aftermath of Flooding – Flyers

We will develop flyers to hand out to people after flooding on the following topics:

- Immediate aftermath – safety, re-entering house and who to call
- Types of repairs – what type of repairs might be necessary and how to handle specific situations such as pools and gas service
- Protecting property – flood proofing and general resources.

The flyers would need to cover topics such as:

- Health and safety (gas leaks, snakes, sharp objects, debris, electricity, etc.)
- Who to call (insurance agents, 3-1-1)
- Why it flooded (general information about local and creek flooding)
- How to handle trash (what needs to be thrown out, household hazardous waste, dead animals, dumpsters)
- Pools
- Repairs and permits (types of repairs that might need to be made, what needs a permit)
- Flood proofing (steps to take to help prevent future damage)
- Hiring a contractor (tips from Better Business Bureau)

Other Efforts

Implement “low hanging fruit” activities from brainstorming in November. Consider how to implement other items from meeting. See attached for details. Low Hanging Fruit (from November 18, 2014 brainstorming session)

ATXfloods.com and ATXfloods Alerts!

This web site features a real-time map that displays roads closed due to flooding. Launched in 2013, the web site has already received more than a million page views and is regularly used by news media to warn drivers of flooded roads during storms. WPD has expanded the site to include nearby jurisdictions such as Williamson County, Hays County, West Lake, Sunset Valley, Bastrop, etc. This web site will be featured in advertising targeting visitors to Austin, especially during major events such as SXSW, ACL, ROT Rally, UT football games, F1, etc.

Driver Education

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WPD has also reached out to driver education organizations. On their recommendation, WPD has distributed PowerPoint slides emphasizing, "Save Yourself! Turn Around – Don't Drown," that can be incorporated into driver education programs. These have been provided to City of Austin safety officers, the Texas Driver Traffic Safety Education Association and the Texas Floodplain Management Association to disseminate to their members. To include this information in Defensive Driving curriculums would require altering state laws. However, the Texas Flash Flood Coalition has successfully added information about flood safety to the Texas Driver's Handbook.

Community Outreach

WPD also incorporates flood safety information in its outreach at fairs, exhibits and other opportunities. Activities include:

- WeatherFest
- Austin Water Science Expo
- City of Austin Employee Safety Fair
- Austin Energy Regional Science Fair

At these types of events, WPD hands out "Turn Around – Don't Drown" magnets, bumper stickers and a children's activity and coloring sheet.

Youth Education

WPD has incorporated flood safety messages into Earth School and Earth Camp, two established Watershed Protection programs that educate 5,000 fifth graders each year about water quality. WPD is also in the process of developing a flood education program, tied to the science curriculum, for middle school students, which should be ready to pilot soon.

Videos/ATXN

WPD worked with ATXN to develop a 30-second video that can be used as a television ad and public service announcement. In addition, we are working with ATXN on a longer video with an EMS District Commander, who was swept away in the October 13, 2013, flood and rescued by StarFlight. We have also just completed videos with ATXN on the buyouts in Onion Creek with people who have successfully gone through the buyout process and on the effects of impervious versus pervious cover.

Other Videos with ATXN

We will work with ATXN to develop and post videos on the web site. Videos will also be useful at neighborhood meetings with a minimal investment in equipment. The following topics need videos:

- Living in a Floodplain – an overview covering safety, flood insurance and building restrictions.
- Prepare for Flooding – covering ATXfloods Alerts!, kits, sheltering in place, flood insurance, etc. This is more in depth look at preparedness than the Living in a Floodplain video.
- After a Flood – from a home, to a street, to a neighborhood, this video will show what gets damaged in floods and what neighborhoods should expect to see. It will also cover immediate, short term and long term issues.

Outreach to Real Estate Agents

The Austin Board of Realtors holds regular trainings for its members. Staff will offer a workshop about building restrictions and insurance. Clients should be encouraged to cover their contents with their flood insurance policy. The same offer will be made to the Real Estate Council of Austin. In addition, we can ask these groups to include information about building restrictions in the floodplain for new development, remodeling and for substantially damaged homes in their

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Outreach for Trails

Signage in Parks and along Trails, Budget to be Determined

Signs in parks and along trails should alert users that the area is subject to flash flooding.

Homeless Population

Working House the Homeless on an informational brochure for the homeless. Information regarding flood safety as it related to creek side camps and camping under bridges will be included. Brochure will also include information on bacteria reduction, water quality, anti-litter, etc.

Flood Safety Awareness Committee:

Watershed Protection Department, Austin Fire Department, Austin/Travis County Emergency Medical Services, Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Public Information Office, National Weather Service, U.S. Geological Survey, LCRA, Texas Floodplain Management Association.

Budget Overview

Advertising – \$247,800

- \$23,800 for Poster Contest and Flood Safety Campaign January through April
- \$73,000 for the following:
 - \$24,000 for emergency ads when flooding is imminent
 - \$25,000 for fall flood safety awareness campaign
 - \$24,000 for ads announcing when new floodplain maps become effective
- \$151,000 for additional/enhanced campaigns, including television in February / March / April / May and August / September. (Note: Since much of our flood safety information has been developed over several years, up to \$30,000 of these funds will be used for an outside entity to review our materials to ensure consistent branding and messaging.)

Printing – \$49,305

- General flood safety information
- Floodplain packets alerting people they are in the floodplain
- Floodplain appeal and effective notices
- ATXfloods Alerts! postcard
- Bilingual brochure “Are You Ready” in conjunction with AFD

Educational and Promotional - \$5,500

- Turn Around – Don’t Drown wristbands for Earth School/ Camp, WeatherFest, Science Expos, etc.
- Bumper stickers, magnets, key chains, car deodorizers, pencils, etc.

